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ABSTRACT

For many years, Robert Boyd has focused on the deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning that many have suggested are underdeveloped in dominant conceptions of transformative learning. Boyd's work is grounded in the field of depth psychology, which is based on a fundamental belief in the powerful role that the dynamic unconscious plays in shaping people's thoughts, feelings, and actions on a day-to-day basis. Boyd's view of transformative learning is grounded in Carl Jung's concept of individuation, which is a process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated. The forces and dynamics associated with individuation are largely unconscious and manifest themselves, independently from the conscious ego, within the emotional, affective, and spiritual dimensions of our lives. Images play a central role in Boyd's notion of transformative education. Research and theory in depth psychology provides some ideas about how to work with the images that might arise within educational contexts. This process, referred to as the "imaginal method," involves describing, associating, amplifying, and animating the images in order to foster learners' insights into their own perceptions and motivations. Boyd's view of transformative learning invites us to embrace a more mytho-poetic understanding of education, to deepen our sense of its emotional and spiritual strength. (Contains 19 references.) (MN)

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Transformative Learning and the Journey of Individuation

Over the last 20 years, transformation theory has deepened our understanding of what it means to learn in adulthood. Collectively, the work of Paulo Freire, Phyllis Cunningham, Laurent Daloz, and Jack Mezirow, among others, addresses the sociocultural and personal dimensions of transformative learning. Dominant views of transformative learning emphasize rational, cognitive processes related to critical reflection. An additional perspective on transformation, however, has emerged, led by Robert Boyd and his colleagues (Boyd 1989, 1991; Boyd and Myers 1988). This work focuses on deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning that many have suggested are underdeveloped in dominant conceptions of transformative learning (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). This Digest summarizes and expands on Boyd's notion of transformative learning, discussing the role of image, symbol, ritual, fantasy, and imagination in transformation.

Boyd's View of Transformative Education

For many years, Boyd's research on the nature of adult learning in small groups has reflected a long-standing commitment to understanding the psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of adult learning. This work is grounded in the field of depth psychology, which is based on a fundamental belief in the powerful role that the dynamic unconscious plays in shaping our thoughts, feelings, and actions on a day-to-day basis. In Boyd's view, powerful feelings, emotions, and affect that arise within our learning experiences draw attention and energies to unconscious issues or concerns seeking to gain voice.

Boyd's earlier work reflected a more Freudian influence, particularly that of Erik Erikson. It was his study of Carl Jung, however, which led him to formulate a view of transformative learning grounded in Jung's concept of individuation (Boyd 1991; Boyd and Myers 1988). Jung (1921, quoted in Jacoby 1990) defines individuation as a "process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated...having as its goal the development of the individual personality" (p. 94). The forces and dynamics associated with individuation are largely unconscious and manifest themselves, independent from the conscious ego, within the emotional, affective, and spiritual dimensions of our lives.

We often discover that, despite our best intentions, our being in the world seems to take on a life of its own. More accurately, we find that our lives are actually made up of multiple selves, each seeming to have its own sense of direction and purpose. Our conscious will is often quite one sided, reflecting the influence of our sociocultural contexts and personal biographies (Clark and Dirkx 2000). From Jung's perspective of individuation, however, we understand that the ego is just one player within the psyche, and not a very powerful one at that. When we begin to participate consciously in this process of individuation, we often discover that our conscious, ego-based striving to be what we *want* to be is not the same as being who we *are* (Jacoby 1990). Without conscious participation, we are much more subject to compulsions, obsessions, and complexes, which may be the darker, more unconscious manifestation of the individuation or transformation process.

Individuation involves differentiating and becoming aware of the presence of the different selves operating within the psyche. This requires an imaginative engagement with the unconscious, a working dialogue between ego consciousness and the powerful contents of the unconscious. According to Boyd, a transformative education fosters the natural processes of individuation through imaginative engagement with these different dimensions of one's unconscious life. This engagement reflects an ongoing dialogue between ego consciousness and one's unconscious.

The Importance of Images

Boyd's notion of transformative education reflects a psyche- or soul-centered psychology (Dirkx 1997; Moore 1992; Scott 1997). That is, what matters most in learning is what matters to the deep ground of our being, the psyche or soul, what is "primary, original, basic, and necessary" (Sells 2000, p. 3). In depth psychology, soul represents a third way, in addition to mind and matter, of thinking about human nature. Some authors have loosely equated soul in education with "heart." This way of knowing is felt to be mediated largely through images rather than directly through concepts or traditional forms of rationalism. Images convey the ways in which we invest or withdraw meaning from the social world. By image, we intend here not mental pictures derived from perception or memories but more in the sense of poetic usage, a kind of *psychic* representation with no actual correspondence in an outer reality. For this reason, I refer to this perspective as the "mytho-poetic" view of transformative learning (Dirkx 1998). The mytho-poetic view relies on images and symbols, the language of poetry. In this sense, this view complements the idea of perspective transformation as described by Mezirow (1991) and Cranton (1994). Perspective transformation relies primarily on critical reflection, reason, and rationality. Although Mezirow (1991) mentions the role of imagination in this process, he does not fully develop its role in transformative learning.

From the mytho-poetic perspective, transformative learning leads not back to the life of the mind, as we might find with reflection and analysis, but to soul. From this perspective, we focus on images, which are thought to represent powerful motifs that represent, at an unconscious level, deep-seated emotional or spiritual issues and concerns. They represent our imaginative engagement with the world, expressing what is not known or knowable through words alone in the self-world relationship. They are manifest through dreams, fantasies, myth, legends, fairy tales, stories, rituals, poetry, and performing arts, such as dance. But images may also be evoked or activated through emotionally laden aspects of interactions with others or with the text being studied.

Boyd's work in this area primarily focused on elaborating the structures and dynamics of transformation as they were manifest within the context of small adult learning groups (Boyd 1989, 1991). Within the last 10 years, several scholars, using depth psychology, have focused more specifically on the imaginative and spiritual aspects of transformative learning. For example, Scott (1997) explores the sense of loss and grief that can accompany personal transformation. In positing transformative learning as autobiography, Nelson (1997) suggests that learners compose their lives by using imagination *and* critical reflection to interpret their life story within the social context. Clark (1997) relies on ancient myths as well as more contemporary Western stories to deepen her understanding of the interconnections among writing, the imagination, and dialogue. In some of my own work, I seek to develop a better understanding of the role that fantasy and imagination play in transformative learning (Dirkx 1998, 2000; Kritskaya and Dirkx 2000) and of nurturing soul as a means of fostering inner work (Dirkx 1997; Dirkx and Deems 1996). This research is providing a foundation for further exploring imaginative and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning.

Working with Images

Many learning situations are capable of evoking potentially powerful emotions and images among adults. In a transformative pedagogy informed by the mytho-poetic perspective, these emotions and images are given voice, expression, and elaboration. Strategies to foster this form of learning engage the adult imaginatively with the content or processes of the learning situation. Educators working from this perspective will make substantial use, regardless of the subject matter, of story, myths, poetry, music, drawing, art, journaling, dance, rituals, or performance. Such approaches allow learners to become aware of and give voice to the images and unconscious dynamics that may be animating their psychic lives within the context of the subject matter and the learning process.

These unconscious aspects of psyches are almost continuously seeking expression within our lives, often in unconscious and disruptive ways. The intent here is to deepen a sense of wholeness by, paradoxically, differentiating, naming, and elaborating all the different selves that make up who we are as persons. Engaging in dialog with these structures is a way of consciously participating in the process of individuation and integrating them more fully within our conscious lives. Research and theory in depth psychology provides us with some ideas about how to work with the images that might arise within educational contexts (Sells 2000; Ulanov 1999). This process, referred to as the "imaginal method," reflects a general collection of strategies useful in fostering learners' insight into those aspects of themselves and their worlds that remain hidden from conscious awareness, yet serve to influence and shape their sense of self, interpretations of their external world, and their day-to-day actions. The specific steps of this process vary but generally involve (1) *describing* the image as clearly as we can; (2) *associating* the image with other aspects of our lives; (3) *amplifying* the image through use of stories, poetry, fairy tales, or myths that present us with similar images; and (4) *animating* the image by allowing it to talk or interact further with us through additional fantasy, or imaging work. These processes may be used with writing, drawing, dialogue, story telling, performance, dance, or other methods described earlier. In addition, learners and educators may decide to use all or only some of these steps, depending on the particular images presented and the directions for work they suggest.

Conclusion

From the perspective discussed here, we are all influenced and shaped by the forces of individuation going on unconsciously within our lives. Whether or not we are aware of them, these forces propel us along a journey and certain courses of action. Transformative learning refers to processes through which we consciously participate in this journey of individuation. Through imaginative engagement with the images and symbols that characterize this journey, we can come to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our relationship with the world around us. Often through such learning, much to our surprise, we find that the direction and nature of this deeper journey do not always reflect the choices and judgments of our ego-dominated consciousness. This lack of parallel between our inner, unconscious life and ego-consciousness is often reflected in feelings of "swimming upstream" or "rowing against the current." When we consciously engage the poetic messages the unconscious offers to us, we begin to experience an alignment of our outer lives with the movement of individuation.

We have much to learn about how these processes manifest themselves within adult learning. The work of Boyd and his colleagues represents only a very modest beginning. Much of what is published thus far related to this view of transformative learning represents theoretical work, grounded in the research of depth psychology. Research approaches in education, even into transformative learning, are largely dominated by rational, logical, ego-based conceptions of knowing. To begin to "see" the mytho-poetic manifestations of transformative learning within adult learning, we need to be willing to entertain learning and knowing as imaginative processes. Although the theoretical and methodological challenges are large, Boyd's pioneering efforts in this area point to the possibilities and rewards of such an effort. In characterizing the powerful role of the imagination in our lives, Hollis (2000) quotes Novalis, a Romantic German poet and theorist: "Poetry heals the wounds reason creates" (p. 35). Boyd's view of transformative learning invites us to embrace a more mytho-poetic understanding of education, to deepen our sense of its emotional and spiritual depth.

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